

Coins

25-cent bill: A find or a fake?

By Roger Boye

MORE QUESTIONS from Tribune readers are answered in this week's column.

Q—While leafing through some family memorabilia, I came upon a 25-cent paper bill. It is of series 1874 and shows a picture of one Robert J. Walker. Could you tell me if the bill is at all unusual today? —J.R., Niles

A—It certainly is. To relieve an acute coin shortage that started during the Civil War, the federal government printed paper money in denominations ranging from 3 to 50 cents.

Nearly \$369 million worth of this so-called fractional currency was issued from 1862 to 1876, but only \$2 million of it is still in existence today. Many of the

remaining bills are in bad shape and of little value to collectors.

Coin dealers sell very fine condition specimens of the bill you described for about \$15. Walker was secretary of the treasury from 1845 to 1849 during the term of President James Polk.

Q—We have a jar almost filled with old quarters. The problem is, the dates have worn away on all of the coins. Is there anything we can do, or should we just spend them? —P.K., Chicago

A—Some coin dealers sell acids that "restore" the dates on old quarters. However, the acids leave dark smudges, so "restored date quarters" are not considered collectors' items.

Nevertheless, old quarters without dates are worth at least six times face value for their silver content.